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cc: Allan Hendrix/HQ/Caltrans/CAGov@DOT, Kim Nystrom/HQ/Caltrans/CAGov@DOT (bcc: Katy Walton/D09/Caltrans/CAGov)  
Subject: Radioactive Waste Shipment on State Route 127

We have been advised by a telephone call from the California Energy Commission that the Department of Energy Nevada Operations Office (the Nevada Test Site) has decided to begin shipments of low-level radioactive waste on State Route 127 in January, 2000. These shipments are from other DOE facilities (the primary current shipper is Fernald, Ohio) being sent to the NTS for disposal. The shipments used to travel on I-15 to Las Vegas, then up US95 to the NTS, but DOE began using a route through northern Nevada last summer, in response to requests from Nevada, Las Vegas, and Clark County to move the shipments out of the Las Vegas Valley.

DOE has been looking for a southern, winter route for several months. They have decided to split the shipments between 160 in Nevada (through Pahrump) and 127 in Inyo and San Bernardino Counties. There will be up to 15 shipments per week from Fernald, with approximately half being routed up 127. Please note that these shipments are legal weight, are not "Highway Route-Controlled Quantities", and do not require permits. Even though these type of shipments are legal to route through California, it goes against the positions expressed in the letters from Sen. Feinstein and Boxer as well as Congressmen Lewis and Farr that were sent to the Secretary of Energy, Bill Richardson.

The full routing in California is: I40 to Nipton Road, Nipton Road to I-15, I-15 to SR127, SR127 to the state line.

The assumption is that all the shipments will be placarded class 7 Radioactive, but we have a call in to DOE-NTS to confirm that. Shipment is in strong, tight metal containers, and experience with these shipments is that they travel inside enclosed trailers.

The last incident that occurred involving these shipments was a leak of liquids, which was detected in the vicinity of Kingman, AZ. In that instance, there was no identified release of radioactive materials. Shipments were halted for about a year while defects in the shipping containers were investigated and corrected.

District 9 continues to be concerned with the use of secondary roads for the shipment of hazardous materials when there are shorter, faster, interstate highway routes available. Detouring to reduce political pressures while increasing the mileage and time traveled sets a dangerous precedent for both low-level and high-level radioactive waste shipments. Technically they should not change the routing unless they can demonstrate that the new route presents a reduction in the radiological risk.